

## **Cotton Acreage Expected to Decrease in 2019**

Friday, April 5, 2019

By Mary Jane Buerkle

After a few years in which cotton acreage was on the rise, the latest estimates from the U.S. Department of Agriculture show a projected decrease in cotton planting in Texas, from 7.75 million in 2018 to 7.3 million to be planted in 2019, down 6 percent.

The USDA report is down more than a half-million acres from the National Cotton Council's estimate in February of about 7.874 million acres to be planted in Texas. Nationwide, the USDA predicts 13.5 million acres of upland cotton to be planted, also down from the NCC survey, which projected just more than 14 million acres.

"We don't expect to see too much change in the PCG service area from last year, based on what we're hearing from growers and ginners," PCG Executive Vice President Steve Verett said, noting that the prospective plantings reports are broken down only to state level and that much of the shift usually happens in areas where growers routinely plant a mix of several different crops, including but not limited to cotton, corn, sorghum, soybeans, and peanuts.

## **USDA Launches New Farmers.gov Features to Help with H-2A Applications, Managing Loans**

Wednesday, April 3, 2019

From the USDA

Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue announced today that the U.S. Department of Agriculture launched two new features on farmers.gov to help customers manage their farm loans and navigate the application process for H-2A visas.

"Customer service is our top priority at USDA and these new features will help our customers as they manage their farm loans and navigate the H-2A temporary agricultural visa program," said Secretary Perdue. "In my travels across the country, I have consistently heard people express a desire for greater use of technology in the way we deliver programs at USDA. As we adopt new technology, we are introducing simple yet innovative approaches to support our farmers, ranchers, producers, and foresters as they support the nation every day. It's my goal to make USDA the most effective, most efficient, most customer-focused department in the entire federal government, and farmers.gov is a big step in that direction."

In 2018, Secretary Perdue unveiled farmers.gov, a dynamic, mobile-friendly public website combined with an authenticated portal where customers will be able to apply for programs, process transactions and manage accounts.

### **Navigating the H-2A Visa Process**

Focused on education and smaller owner-operators, this farmers.gov H-2A Phase I release includes an H-2A Visa Program page and interactive checklist tool, with application requirements, fees, forms, and a timeline built around a farmer's hiring needs.

The H-2A Visa Program – also known as the temporary agricultural workers program – helps American farmers fill

employment gaps by hiring workers from other countries. The U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, U.S. Department of State, and state workforce agencies each manage parts of the H-2A Visa Program independently, with separate websites and complex business applications.

Over the next several months, USDA will collaborate further with the U.S. Department of Labor on farmers.gov H-2A Phase II – a streamlined H-2A Visa Program application form, regulations, and digital application process that moves producers seamlessly from farmers.gov website to farmers.gov portal to U.S. Department of Labor's IT systems.

### **Managing Farm Loans Online**

The self-service website now enables agricultural producers to login to view loan information, history and payments.

Customers can access the "My Financial Information" feature by desktop computer, tablet or phone. They can now view:

- loan information;
- interest payments for the current calendar year (including year-to-date interest paid for the past five years);
- loan advance and payment history;
- paid-in-full and restructured loans; and
- account alerts giving borrowers important notifications regarding their loans.

To access their information, producers will need a USDA eAuth account to login into farmers.gov. After obtaining an eAuth account, producers should visit farmers.gov and sign into the site's authenticated portal via the "Sign In / Sign Up" link at the top right of the website.

Currently, only producers doing business as individuals can view information. Entities, such as an LLC or Trust, or producers doing business on behalf of another customer cannot access the portal at this time, but access is being planned.

Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox or Microsoft Edge are the recommended browsers to access the feature.

## **Upcoming Area Auxin Trainings**

**April 10** - Auxin Training, 9:30 a.m., Mallet Event Center, **Levelland**

**April 12** - Auxin Training, 9-11 a.m., Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center, 1102 E. FM 1294, **Lubbock**

**April 12** - Auxin Training, 10 a.m., Lamb County AgriLife Extension Office, 100 6th Drive, Room B-5, **Littlefield**

**April 19** - Auxin Training, 10 a.m., Castro County AgriLife Extension Office, 205 N. Broadway, **Dimmitt**

**April 26** - Auxin Training, 10 a.m., Hale County AgriLife Extension Office, 225 Broadway St #6, **Plainview**

**May 3** - Auxin Training, 10 a.m., Lamb County AgriLife Extension Office, 100 6th Drive, Room B-5, **Littlefield**

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